

Chapter 6 – Employee Health and Hygiene

Employee health and hygiene, directly or indirectly, plays an important role in food safety and sanitation. Sick employees and poor hygienic practices are major causes of foodborne disease outbreaks.

Direct employee sources of foodborne disease organisms are the following:

- Sick employees
- Normal flora
- Transient microorganisms

SICK EMPLOYEES

Man is subject to a number of communicable diseases that contribute to food contamination. These are listed in

Idaho Reportable Diseases, which is a regulation of the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare. Specifically, the diseases and conditions of concern are the following:

- Amebiasis
- Campylobacteriosis
- Cholera
- Diarrhea (until common communicable causes have been ruled out)
- Diphtheria
- E. coli 0157:H7*
- Giardiasis
- Hepatitis A*
- Salmonellosis*
- Shigellosis*
- Staphylococcal skin infections
- Streptococcal skin infections
- Taeniasis
- Active tuberculosis
- Vomiting (until non-infectious cause is identified)

* - these diseases are part of what is commonly called "The Big 4". A food worker diagnosed with any of the "Big 4" is required to be excluded from working in the

food establishment until a doctor's clearance or health department clearance is given.

Because of the potential communicability of these diseases and conditions, the following requirement ***must be strictly followed*** at all times:

IDAHO HEALTH RULES AND REGULATIONS PROHIBIT ANY PERSON WHO IS INFECTED WITH A DISEASE WHICH CAN BE TRANSMITTED BY FOOD TO WORK AS A FOOD HANDLER AS LONG AS THE DISEASE IS IN A COMMUNICABLE STAGE.

It is the responsibility of the employee to inform the license holder or person in charge of such illness. It is the responsibility of the license holder or person in charge to ensure compliance with this requirement and to notify health officials if a disease or outbreak is suspected.

Symptoms of these diseases can include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever, jaundice, sore throat with fever, and/or abdominal pain. Workers with these symptoms must not be allowed to work with the food because the worker can easily transmit the disease through contact with the food. It is the responsibility of the person in charge to exclude food workers with any of these symptoms. For guidance on this issue, the person in charge should contact the local District Health Department.

NORMAL FLORA

People normally carry some bacteria on or in their bodies that can cause foodborne diseases. These are called "normal flora" and most people do not know they are there. For example, on the average, almost two-thirds of the population are carriers of the bacteria that causes Clostridium perfringens food poisoning and one out of every three persons has Staphylococcus aureus in their nasal passages as normal flora. A simple act of touching the nose or blowing the nose is sufficient to contaminate the hands with this important disease-causing bacteria.

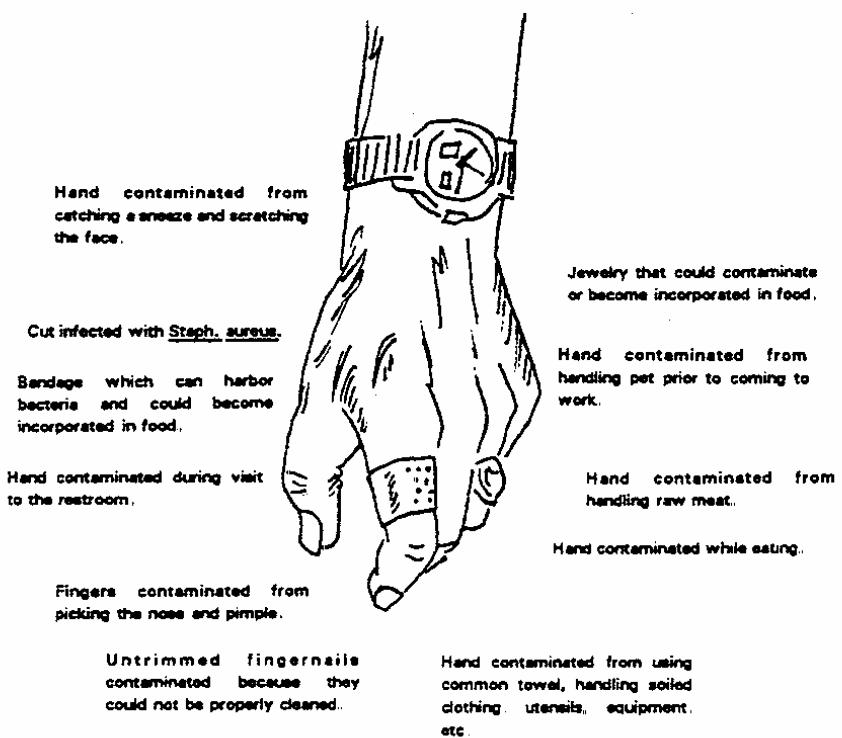
TRANSIENT MICROORGANISMS

Also, there are transient microorganisms that are found on the body, **particularly the hands**, which are picked up during contact with food, utensils and other sources that may be contaminated. The following illustration depicts how hands can contribute to the contamination of food, utensils, equipment, etc.:

HANDS

Hands can play a very important role in the effects on foodborne illnesses. **One of the most simple, yet most important things you can do in a food establishment is wash your hands often!** The following illustration demonstrates how many things can be affected by dirty hands and also the many ways that hands can become dirty.

AN IMPORTANT SOURCE OF CONTAMINATION THAT CAN CONTRIBUTE TO FOODBORNE DISEASE OUTBREAKS



WASHING HANDS

Because hands are so important in the transmission of disease organisms, they must be properly washed and washed often. Effective washing can only be accomplished when jewelry is not worn, fingernails are trimmed and adequate handwashing facilities are provided and used.

Handwashing is not effective unless a good lather is built up and all portions of the hands and lower arms are vigorously friction rubbed for **20 to 30 seconds**.

Proper handwashing includes the following steps: Turn on warm water, apply soap and rub vigorously for at least 20 seconds, rinse with warm water, dry hands with paper towel, turn off water with paper towel.

Handwashing can be enhanced by using a fingernail brush, lathering twice, and a post-washing sanitizer dip.

WHEN TO WASH HANDS

The following list can serve as a guide for when to wash the hands:

- Immediately prior to engaging in food establishment operations;
- After using the toilet;
- Before handling food, clean food-contact surfaces of equipment or utensils;
- Before putting on gloves to work with food;
- After eating, drinking, using tobacco, coughing, sneezing, touching the mouth, touching the nose, or touching the hair;
- After handling raw meat, poultry and seafood when cross-contamination can occur;
- After handling garbage, dirty dishes or soiled equipment;
- After handling personal belongings (street clothing, purses, cosmetics, etc.); and
- At any other time during the work hours as necessary to keep hands clean.

INJURIES

Injuries on the hands and lower portions of the arms such as cuts, abrasions, burns and even a hangnail must be cleaned and treated immediately. Often these injuries become infected. As a result, they can contribute to the contamination of food and equipment with disease-causing organisms.

Finger and surface bandages also contribute to contamination. Such bandages are commonly lost and become incorporated in food. A recent complaint was a result of a finger bandage being found in a donut (the complaint was made by the attorney of the consumer).

To prevent food and surface contamination from an infected injury or bandage, wear a rubber or plastic glove until the injury is healed.

OTHER HYGIENIC PRACTICES

In addition to the foregoing personal hygiene considerations, the following good hygienic practices must be observed:

- **Do not smoke, drink or eat in food preparation and dishwashing areas.** Such practices contribute to the contamination of hands, food and food-contact surfaces with saliva that may harbor disease-causing organisms. Have designated areas for employees to take breaks to smoke, drink and eat.
- Do not wash hands in sinks designated for food preparation or equipment and utensil washing. This practice contributes to food and equipment and utensil contamination.
- Do not dry hands on a common towel (towel which can be used repeatedly and by other employees), wiping cloths, apron or clothing. Such practices defeat proper handwashing and result in contamination.

SUMMARY

- Sick employees and poor hygienic practices are major causes of foodborne disease outbreaks.
- Health regulations prohibit persons who are sick with a disease that can be transmitted by food to work as a food handler as long as the illness is in a communicable stage. Some diseases require a doctor's note or health department clearance before you can return to work.
- Hands are an important source of contamination that can contribute to foodborne disease outbreaks.
- Hands must be properly washed and washed often to remove disease organisms.
- Wash hands with a good lather and vigorously friction rub for 20 to 30 seconds.
- Hands need to be washed **after using the toilet** and as often as necessary to keep the hands and exposed portions of the arms clean.
- Injuries need to be properly cleaned, treated and protected to prevent contamination.
- **Do not smoke, drink or eat in food preparation and dishwashing areas.**
- Do not use a common towel.

Reference: *Idaho Food Code*, Chapter 2